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Ed Dombroskas
HB 5044 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Ed Dombroskas and I am the Executive Director of the Eastern Regional Tourism District which we market as "**Mystic Country**".

As an important Connecticut industry that creates jobs and stimulates economic activity by attracting out of state visitors who spend money in our attractions, hotels, restaurants and retail outlets we are wise to invest in it.

This year, the Governor's budget recommendation effectively eliminates regional tourism efforts and replaces them with potential project based grants administered by the Comptroller and disconnected from the statewide tourism marketing efforts. Economically, tourism is essential to eastern Connecticut generating jobs and income for businesses and families. We know from independent research that visitors who choose to come to Mystic Country have a different demographic profile than visitors to the Western and Central regions. Knowing this we are able to leverage and adjust state efforts with our own regional efforts to be a very attractive destination to travelers.

The Eastern Regional Tourism District has proven its effectiveness by leveraging private funds, reaching out to and representing all tourism constituents and maintaining successful and measurable programs. The economic success of tourism in eastern Connecticut depends on the ability to bring all constituents, large and small, together in a coordinated approach through the Regional Tourism District.

Our concerns with the proposed budget modifications include:

- Due to severely reduced funding levels the competition for funding between dissimilar organizations would be intense.
- Programs, like Regional Tourism, are ongoing comprehensive efforts. Given the complexity of creating a competitive funding process, as outlined, it is very likely that FY'17 funding would be delayed and tourism programs suspended until a revenue stream could be established. This is exactly what happened in 2009 with disastrous results to the tourism industry and the tourism-based economy.
- Tourism marketing and promotion requires integrated efforts such as paid media, public relations, social media, material fulfillment and distribution, direct sales, graphic design and much more. A grant-based approach only supports selected individual efforts, which does not effectively support the tourism industry.
- Requiring the Regional Tourism District to annually compete for grant funding would destroy all long term planning.
- Successful tourism promotion depends on coordinating with State efforts. The Regional Tourism District brings the voice of the smaller but vital entities to the State efforts.

If the budget is approved as presented, we close our office as of July 1. Without our Regional Tourism District we stop distribution of the Visitors Guide, responses to inquiries from our advertising will stop, we will stop collecting information from our tourism businesses and updating content on the new State website. We stop Facebook. We stop tweeting events. We stop responding to editors and press inquiries. No one answers the phone or emails. No regional trade shows, no subsidized co-op advertising opportunities. It all will be gone.